

THE OPENING VERSE OF A CHRISTMAS HYMN REMINDS US ABOUT THE SPECIAL NATURE OF THIS NIGHT AND HOW WE CAN RESPOND TO IT:

‘O HOLY NIGHT! THE STARS ARE BRIGHTLY SHINING, IT IS THE NIGHT OF OUR DEAR SAVIOR’S BIRTH.

LONG LAY THE WORLD IN SIN AND ERROR PINING, ’TIL HE APPEARED AND THE SOUL FELT ITS WORTH.

A THRILL OF HOPE THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES, FOR YONDER BREAKS A NEW AND GLORIOUS MORN.

FALL ON YOUR KNEES; O HEAR THE ANGEL’S VOICES! O NIGHT DIVINE, O NIGHT WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN, O NIGHT, O HOLY NIGHT, O NIGHT DIVINE!”

THIS INDEED IS A DIVINE AND HOLY NIGHT WHEN WE GATHER FOR WORSHIP TO REMEMBER AND REJOICE THAT JESUS WAS BORN.

BUT TO REALLY GRASP THE HOLY NATURE OF THAT EVENT WE MUST ALSO REMEMBER NOT ONLY THE STORY OF JESUS’ BIRTH BUT ALSO WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS.

THIS YEAR WHEN WE WERE DECORATING THE CHURCH FOR THE ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASONS, A CHURCH MEMBER FOUND A SMALL BOX WITH A LARGE NAIL IN IT.

ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE BOX WAS A PAPER WITH THE TRUE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS NAIL.

THE SERMON BEGINS WITH THAT STORY, SINCE IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT I USE IT AS THE BASIS OF TONIGHT’S REFLECTION ON THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

“YEARS AGO, IN A COLORADO TOWN... A YOUNG COUPLE WAS CONTEMPLATING THE APPROACHING CHRISTMAS SEASON.

AS THEIR THOUGHTS MEANDERED FROM THE STABLE AND MANGER TO THE SHOPPING MALL, THEY KNEW THAT THEIR MEAGER WAGES WOULD PREVENT THEM FROM PURCHASING COSTLY CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

THEREFORE, THEY SET OUT TO MAKE THEIR OWN THAT YEAR. LATER THAT MONTH, WHILE THE YOUNG MAN WAS IN A LOCAL HARDWARE STORE, HE SPOTTED A VERY LARGE NAIL.

IT WAS NEARLY TEN INCHES LONG AND VERY HEAVY. SEEING SUCH A NAIL, HIS THOUGHTS WERE DRAWN TO THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

HOW LARGE THOSE NAILS MUST HAVE BEEN-HOW WICKED THEIR PURPOSE. AS HE WANDERED AROUND THE STORE, HE COULD NOT KEEP THE SOBERING THOUGHTS OF THAT NAIL FROM HIS MIND.

HE DECIDED TO BUY ONE OF THE NAILS AND SHOW IT TO HIS WIFE. WHEN SHE SAW IT, HER RESPONSE WAS EXACTLY THE SAME.

TOGETHER THEY WONDERED IF PERHAPS, THIS MASSIVE NAIL WOULD CAUSE OTHER PEOPLE TO REMEMBER CHRIST’S DEATH AT THE TIME OF HIS BIRTH.

‘WASN’T HE BORN TO DIE?’ THEY ASKED EACH OTHER. ‘WHAT BETTER TIME THAN AT HIS BIRTH, TO RECALL HIS REASON FOR COMING AND THE GIFT HE WOULD GIVE.’

THOSE THOUGHTS STAYED WITH THEM THE REST OF THE EVENING. WITHOUT CHRIST’S DEATH AND RESURRECTION, THERE WOULD BE NO CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS....

NO ONE WOULD RECALL THE INTRICATE DETAILS ACCOMPANYING THE BIRTH OF JUST ONE MORE GOOD PERSON.

NO STARRY NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM WOULD MEAN ANYTHING TODAY IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE END OF THE STORY.

AND SO, WITHOUT PLAN OR PREPARATION, THE YOUNG COUPLE SAT IN THEIR TINY ATTIC APARTMENT AND BEGAN TO SCRIBBLE OUT A POEM THAT WOULD COMMUNICATE THE TRUTH OF CHRISTMAS.

THEY CONSIDERED THE CHRISTMAS TREE TO BE ONE OF THE MOST CENTRAL SYMBOLS OF THE SEASON.

AND THEY WONDERED WHETHER THEIR NAIL MIGHT BECOME A PART OF THE TIME-HONORED TRADITION OF DECORATING ONE'S CHRISTMAS TREE.

THEN IT STRUCK THEM...THIS NAIL WOULD BE AN ORNAMENT HUNG ON THE TREE ITSELF. IT WAS WEIGHTY AND WOULD PULL DOWN ANY NORMAL BRANCH.

THEREFORE, IT HAD TO BE HUNG DEEP INSIDE THE TREE NEAR THE TRUNK. THEY WORRIED THAT SUCH A PLACEMENT WOULD NOT ALLOW IT TO BE SEEN AS ALL ORNAMENTS ARE INTENDED.

SLOWLY, A POWERFUL REALIZATION WASHED OVER BOTH OF THEM. THIS ORNAMENT, LIKE THE SAVIOR HIMSELF, WOULD NOT BE LIKE ANY OTHER.

IT WOULD BE OBSCURED, JUST AS JESUS HAD BEEN OBSCURED AMONG THE TRAPPINGS OF THE STABLE AND ITS ANIMALS.

THIS ORNAMENT WOULD BECOME A PRIVATE DEVOTION FOR THOSE WHO HUNG IT. IT WOULD SERVE AS A SILENT REMINDER...THAT IT WAS A TREE UPON WHICH CHRIST REDEEMED THE WORLD.”

THE STORY CONTINUES TO TELL HOW THEY WRAPPED THE NAIL IN TISSUE PAPER AND GAVE IT THEIR FAMILY, ALONG WITH THE POEM.

THEIR FAMILY WAS MOVED BY THE UNUSUAL ORNAMENT AS THEY HUNG THE FIRST CHRISTMAS NAIL ON THE FAMILY CHRISTMAS TREE.

LATER IT WAS SUGGESTED THE YOUNG COUPLE WRITE DOWN THEIR STORY AND THEY SELL CHRISTMAS NAIL ORNAMENTS.

IN THAT WAY THEY MIGHT HELP OTHERS BEGIN A FAMILY TRADITION OF THE CHRISTMAS NAIL HANGING ON THEIR TREE. AND SO THEY DID.

THIS IS CERTAINLY A DIFFERENT KIND OF MESSAGE THAN WE ARE USED TO HEARING ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

AND YET IF WE THINK ABOUT IT, THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM, HAS WHAT COULD BE SEEN AS A CROSS AS ITS CENTER.

THEN THERE ARE THE WORDS OF SOME WELL-KNOWN CHRISTMAS HYMNS: “O HOLY NIGHT” SPEAKS ABOUT SIN.

ONE VERSE OF “HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING” SAYS- “HAIL THE HEAVEN BORN PRINCE OF PEACE. HAIL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

LIGHT AND LIFE TO ALL HE BRINGS, RISEN WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS. MILD HE LAY HIS GLORY BY, BORN THAT WE NO MORE MAY DIE....”

AND “WE THREE KINGS” PROCLAIMS- “GLORIOUS NOW BEHOLD HIM ARISE, KING AND GOD AND SACRIFICE....”

MANY MORE HYMNS SPEAK ABOUT CHRIST AS SAVIOR WHICH, AS CHRISTIANS KNOW, IMPLIES HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR OUR SAKES.

INDEED, THE ANGEL TOLD JOSEPH IN A DREAM THAT MARY’S CHILD SHOULD BE NAMED JESUS, FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.

THEN, ON THE NIGHT OF CHRIST’S BIRTH, THE ANGEL APPEARED TO THE SHEPHERDS ON THE HILLS OF BETHLEHEM.

THE MESSAGE DELIVERED TO THEM ANNOUNCED: “TO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID, A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.”

IN ALL THESE WAYS AND MORE GOD REMINDS US TODAY WE ONLY CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS BECAUSE WE REMEMBER CHRIST’S BIRTH IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HAPPENED LATER.

CHRISTIANS ALWAYS ARE SUPPOSE TO LOOK BACK IN TIME- PAST THE EMPTY TOMB AND CROSS TO THE MANGER, SINCE THE LATER EVENTS GIVE MEANING TO THE FORMER.

YES, IN BOTH SCRIPTURE AND SONG, WE ARE TOLD OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT JESUS IS THE FIRST CHRISTMAS PRESENT EVER GIVEN.

LET US ALSO REMEMBER THAT JESUS IS ALSO THE ONLY CHRISTMAS GIFT THAT IS CONTINUALLY BEING GIVEN BY GOD ALL YEAR ROUND.

FURTHERMORE, CHRIST OUR SAVIOR IS THE ONLY CHRISTMAS GIFT THAT REALLY MATTERS IN OUR LIVES.

HE IS GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE AND LIGHT, PRESENCE AND SALVATION, MERCY AND FORGIVENESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND PEACE.

SADLY, THIS ONE AND ONLY GIFT THAT REALLY MATTERS, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, USUALLY GETS BURIED BENEATH THE MATERIAL PRESENTS WE GIVE AND RECEIVE.

LET US, THEREFORE, GIVE TO JESUS CHRIST THE ONLY BIRTHDAY PRESENT HE DESIRES FROM US, AND THAT IS FOR US TO DESIRE AND WELCOME HIM.

THE LYRICS OF "O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM REMIND US ABOUT THIS WITH THE PRAYERFUL WORDS:

"O HOLY CHILD OF BETHLEHEM, DESCEND TO US WE PRAY;
CAST OUT OUR SIN AND ENTER IN, BE BORN IN US TODAY.

WE HEAR THE CHRISTMAS ANGELS, THE GREAT GLAD TIDINGS TELL; O COME TO US, ABIDE WITH US, OUR LORD EMMANUEL."

MAY WE LOOK FOR JESUS UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE OR IN OUR CHRISTMAS STOCKING-BUT ESPECIALLY WITHIN OUR HEARTS AND SOULS AS WE CELEBRATE TONIGHT AND TOMORROW.

AS A VERSE OF THE FIRST NOWELL REMINDS US: "THEN LET US ALL WITH ONE ACCORD SING PRAISES TO OUR HEAVENLY LORD.

THAT HATH MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH OF NOUGHT, AND WITH HIS BLOOD OUR LIFE HATH BOUGHT. NOWELL, NOWELL... BORN IS THE KING OF ISRAEL."

MAY OUR ADORATION OF CHRIST BE THE BEST PART OF OUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION.

AND SO, IN CONCLUSION, LISTEN TO A POEM CALLED: "GOD'S GIFT," WRITTEN BY ROY LESSIN.

IT SUMMARIZES THE DIFFERENT KIND OF CHRISTMAS MESSAGE WE HEARD THIS EVENING:

"LITTLE BABY ON THE HAY, SOON THERE'LL BE ANOTHER DAY, WHEN NAILS SHALL PIERCE YOUR HANDS AND FEET, AS YOU PROVIDE OUR SIN'S DEFEAT.

RISEN JESUS ON THE THRONE WE GIVE OUR PRAISE TO YOU ALONE-FOR YOU'RE THE GIFT THAT WE RECEIVE, THE MOMENT THAT OUR HEARTS BELIEVE."

LET US PRAY: GOD OF POWER AND LOVE, WE PRAISE YOU FOR JESUS CHRIST WHO CAME TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS.

WE THANK YOU FOR THE OBEDIENCE OF MARY AND JOSEPH, THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGELS AND DEVOTION OF THE SHEPHERDS.

WE REJOICE IN THE BIRTH OF JESUS, EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US TO BE OUR SAVIOR. EMPOWER US BY YOUR SPIRIT TO BE CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD.

MAY OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS BE THE MEANS BY WHICH OTHERS WILL BE DRAWN TO JESUS AND ACCEPT YOUR GIFT OF HIM AS THEIR SAVIOR.

WE PRAY THE WORLD THIS NIGHT, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN NEED OF SHELTER OR FOOD, CLOTHING OR SAFETY, HEALING OR COMFORT. FOR THOSE WITHOUT HEAT OR ELECTRIC. STRANDED TRAVELERS, AND THOSE WHO MOURN.

WE PRAY AS WELL FOR THOSE WHO NEED CHRIST TO BE BORN WITHIN THEM. MAY YOU OPEN THEIR HEARTS TO RECEIVE THE PRICELESS GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE. IN OUR SAVIOR'S NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: 'A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS MESSAGE'

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HOW LARGE THOSE NAILS MUST HAVE BEEN-HOW WICKED THEIR PURPOSE. HE DECIDED TO BUY ONE OF THE NAILS AND SHOW IT TO HIS WIFE. WHEN SHE SAW IT, HER RESPONSE WAS EXACTLY THE SAME... THEY WONDERED IF PERHAPS, THIS MASSIVE NAIL WOULD CAUSE OTHER PEOPLE TO REMEMBER CHRIST'S DEATH AT THE TIME OF HIS BIRTH.

WITHOUT CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION, THERE WOULD BE NO CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS....NO ONE WOULD RECALL THE INTRICATE DETAILS ACCOMPANYING THE BIRTH OF JUST ONE MORE GOOD PERSON.

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THEIR FAMILY WAS MOVED BY THE UNUSUAL ORNAMENT AS THEY HUNG THE FIRST CHRISTMAS NAIL ON THE FAMILY CHRISTMAS TREE. LATER IT WAS SUGGESTED THE YOUNG COUPLE WRITE DOWN THEIR STORY AND THEY SELL CHRISTMAS NAIL ORNAMENTS.

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AND MANY CHRISTMAS SONGS SPEAK ABOUT OUR SINS; AND CHRIST AS SAVIOR WHICH, AS CHRISTIANS KNOW, IMPLIES HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR OUR SAKES. THE ACCOUNTS OF JESUS BIRTH IN THE BIBLE ALSO MENTION HIS ROLE AS SAVIOR TO BE THE REASON FOR HIS BIRTH.

IN ALL THESE WAYS AND MORE GOD REMINDS US TODAY WE ONLY CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS BECAUSE WE REMEMBER CHRIST'S BIRTH IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HAPPENED LATER. IN BOTH SCRIPTURE AND SONG, WE ARE TOLD OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT JESUS IS THE FIRST CHRISTMAS PRESENT EVER GIVEN.

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